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## **PEER FEEDBACK IN COLLEGE EFL WRITING: A REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

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### **Abstract**

Peer feedback in EFL settings has become an interesting area to explore in the past thirty years. This study reviews 16 empirical research studies on offline peer feedback in college EFL writing. There are 4 research questions addressed in this study, namely (1) what types of peer feedback are mostly researched in the past 10 years?, (2) what kinds of research objectives are addressed?, (3) what kinds of data collection and analysis methods are implemented to address the research questions?, and (4) what are methodological challenges reported in the studies reviewed? The researchers employed Norris and Ortega (2006) characteristics of systematic research synthesis and followed a chapter from Adolescent Literacies in a Multicultural Context edited by Cumming (2012). The findings show that there are four criteria of feedback types mainly involved: written/spoken, in-class/out-of-class, anonymous/non-anonymous, and trained/untrained. Most of these studies are designed to explore the students' perceptions toward peer feedback processes and products, with qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methodologies. Furthermore, the methodological challenges emerged from these studies are discussed, especially the ethical issues. It is hoped that the research gaps identified in these studies and future research implications provided can shed light on future research in similar areas.

**Keywords:** peer feedback, EFL writing, college EFL setting, methodological review

### **Introduction**

The past thirty years have witnessed a growing body of research on peer feedback in English writing classes (Chang, 2016; Hyland, 2019; Yu & Lee, 2016). Peer feedback, which has several terms like peer response (Hyland, 2019), peer evaluation (Tahir, 2012), or peer editing (Yu & Lee, 2015), is viewed as a common pedagogical activity in ESL and EFL writing classrooms. In a general agreement, it refers to a practice in a writing classroom where one student gives feedback on his/her friend's writing during the drafting process. These students play roles as reviewer and receiver of the feedback. More specifically, we adopt Hansen and Liu's definition of peer feedback (2012) as:

the use of learners as sources of information and interactants for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher, tutor, or editor in commenting on and critiquing each other's drafts in both written and oral formats in the process of writing (p. 1).

Originated from L1 research, the practice of peer feedback has been given credits for providing a non-threatening atmosphere for the student, enhancing their sense of audience, and improving their drafts (Hyland, 2019; Keh, 1990). Most research has been conducted on students as feedback receivers, with some exception of investigating the students who practice as reviewers (see Patchan & Schunn, 2015). In a nutshell, most studies conducted on peer feedback practices in English writing have reported positive results (Yu & Lee, 2016). However, some scholars are more reserved about the application of peer feedback, arguing that students might lack trust in their readers or feel frustration due to miscommunication with their peers (Mangelsdorf, 1992; Carson & Nelson, 1996). Although there is a large body of scholarship that looks at the role of peer feedback in English writing education, there is a lack of comprehensive review specifically focusing on the previous studies conducted on English as a foreign language in the college writing contexts.

There have been some review articles on peer feedback on writing in English. Owing to the importance of peer feedback on English language writing, Yu and Lee (2016) comprehensively review studies of peer feedback in second language (L2) writing published between 2005 to 2014, focusing on the aspects including, in part, effectiveness on writers compared with teacher feedback, benefits of peer feedback for the reviewers, and cultural issues. Another secondary study, Chang's thematic analysis, includes 103 empirical articles published from 1990 to 2015 and analyzes them in terms of perceptions, process, and products of peer feedback in second language writing (2016). Reviewing articles about the feedback of writing in general, Hyland, Nicolás-Conesa, & Cerezo (2016) point out that while a wealth of data is generated from ESL contexts, much less is explored in EFL contexts. To the best knowledge of the authors, there is no research synthesis or meta-analysis specifically for peer feedback in the EFL college context. Furthermore, no research synthesis has centered on the methodological issues despite the important role played by methodology in English acquisition research academia. The goals motivating our research include:

1. To fill the lacunas aforementioned and provide a clear and organization review on the primary studies of peer feedback processed in EFL college settings, published from 2011-2020.
2. To showcase the most researched aspects, the recent research trends, and the challenges emerged in terms of research methodology in EFL peer feedback in the last ten years, providing valuable implications for researchers.
3. To uncover the methodological gaps of the existing literature from 2011 to 2020 and showcase the directions for future research in college EFL writing peer feedback.

***Research from various theoretical and methodological perspectives***

A large amount of literature on L2 peer feedback and its benefits have been conducted (Hansen & Liu, 2005; Montgomery & Baker, 2007; Lee, 2008; Lundstorm & Baker, 2009; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010). Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) state that feedback, including peer feedback, holds out to be one constant element in the pedagogy of writing. From the sociocultural perspective, the social interaction that is formed through students' collaboration when they become a reviewer and receiver of feedback is viewed as the most effective way to facilitate students to attain higher levels of writing proficiency (Zhao, 2018). This is in accordance with Vygotsky's theory (1987) of Zone of Proximal Development which highlights that individual cognitive development results from social interaction. This perspective highlights two important keys in learning, the importance of social interaction and process-oriented. Through peer feedback, the reviewers try to guide the receivers on how to revise their writing drafts. This guidance or assistance that is given by the reviewers is known as scaffolding (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). In this scaffolding, it is expected that students are able "to be both experts and novices, which helped them to assist one another to attain a higher level of performance" (Cao, Yu, & Huang, 2019, p. 103). The final purpose of scaffolding is that students are able to internalize the knowledge they have learned and become self-regulated towards their future writing tasks.

From the cognitive perspective, which focuses more on the learning process inside of the students' mind, students' self-confidence gets improved and feel less anxiety when they receive positive comments from their peers, and they are motivated to provide feedback for their classmates (Conner & Moulton, 2000). Yastibas & Yastibas' study (2015) also reports that peer feedback reduces students' anxiety because it enables the students to work collaboratively with other friends, so they can learn from each other. Both L2 and L2 cognitive researchers advance that peer feedback helps writers write and review their works with audience awareness (Becker, 2006). Audience awareness, or reader awareness, according to many scholars, is an important indicator of writing quality, distinguishing expert from novice writers (e.g., Kroll, 1981; Carvalho, 2002). Moreover, through providing and receiving feedback, the writers get comprehensive perceptions of how different readers react to the same writing and thus plan, create, and revise their works more holistically (Becker, 2006). However, Van Lier (2004) recommends L2 researchers to conduct further studies on students' cognitive processes and make them connected to the environment in order to provide broader perspectives of the L2 learning process.

In terms of the methodology applied in the research of peer feedback in second language writing, Yu and Lee (2016) discuss it in their State-of-the-Art article reviewing studies about peer feedback published from 2005 to 2014. According to them, during this period, qualitative case studies, either single case or multiple cases, had been most commonly conducted in this area mainly focusing on the process peer feedback, with triangulation of multiple data sources. Quantitative studies about peer feedback frequently investigated its effectiveness on students' compositions. Furthermore, the paper shows that mixed-method designs had been increasingly applied to garner comprehensive images about peer feedback, such as integrating questionnaires and standard tests with interviews.

## **Method**

As it was stated in the introduction part, no research synthesis has centered on the methodology issues in this area despite the important role played by methodology in English acquisition research academia. To fill the lacunas, capture the recent research trends, and provide the implications of future research methodologies for EFL educators and researchers, we conduct a research synthesis analyzing the methodologies of empirical studies of peer feedback in undergraduate English writing published in the last ten years (2011-2020). Specifically, four research questions guiding this review are:

1. What types of peer feedback are mostly researched in the past 10 years?
2. What kinds of research objectives are addressed?
3. What kinds of data collection and analysis methods are implemented to address the research questions?
4. What are the methodological challenges reported in the studies reviewed?

## ***Selection Criteria***

The writers employed Norris and Ortega (2006) characteristics of systematic research synthesis and followed a chapter from *Adolescent Literacies in a Multicultural Context* edited by Cumming (2012). The study followed some inclusion criteria as follows:

1. The study was limited to the discussion on face-to-face peer feedback in EFL college writing and, therefore, we exclude computer-based forms of peer feedback.
2. The study only included the published empirical research articles in the last ten years (2011-2020) in order to provide original empirical results and findings.
3. The study limited its discussion on EFL college student setting since peer feedback in EFL writing still becomes EFL teacher interest and practice.
4. The study included written and spoken modes of peer feedback because the focus was on the feedback, not on the way.

## ***Literature Search Procedures***

The writers located the search by using four online databases in order to synthesize the published empirical articles and studies that are relevant to the study focus. They were Scopus, Direct Science, Web of Science, and Ebscohost. The combination of keywords related to the topic was implemented, including “peer feedback”, “L2 writing”, “EFL setting”, “EFL college students”, “revision”, “types of peer feedback”, and “role of training”. In addition, manual search was also performed in prominent journals on second language writing, such as *TESOL Quarterly*, *Language Teaching*, *Journal of Second Language Writing*, *The Modern Language Journal*. Furthermore, Google Scholar search engine and Ohio State University library database were also used to find additional research papers and/or attest the studies. Finally, the writers also searched for information from the reference page of related books and published articles to be used as sources for potential studies. After conducting an initial review of the articles obtained from the above databases at the abstract level, there were 27 articles selected. However, after thoroughly reading those articles and putting the important information into a table, there were 16 studies that were matched with the inclusion criteria.

## **Findings and Discussion**

This study reviews 16 empirical research articles on peer feedback in college EFL writing in order to answer the four research questions, they are: (1) what types of peer feedback are mostly researched in the past 10 years?, (2) what kinds of research objectives are addressed?, (3) What kinds of data collection and analysis methods are implemented to address the research questions?, and (4) what are methodological challenges reported in the studies reviewed?

### ***Types of peer feedback that are mostly researched in the past 10 years***

#### ***Background of the primary studies***

For the research background of these 16 studies, 10 studies were conducted in mainland China (Yu & Lee, 2015; Wang & Lu, 2016; Lei, 2017; Yu & Hu, 2017a; Yu & Hu, 2017b; Cao, Yu, & Huang, 2018; Tian & Li, 2018; Zhao, 2018; Zhu & Carless, 2018; Shen, Bai, & Xue, 2020). Others were respectively conducted in Iran (Rahimi, 2013), Indonesia (Kusumaningrum, Cahyono, & Prayogo, 2019), Vietnam (Nguyen, 2016), Saudi Arabia (Alnasser & Alyousef, 2015), Malaysia (Daud, Gilmore & Mayo, 2013) and Japan (2019). Therefore, research in different regions is strongly recommended, especially with the non-Asian EFL context.

### ***Types of Peer Feedback Most Commonly Conducted for EFL Undergraduate Students***

The first question addressed in this paper is related to types of peer feedback that are most commonly conducted for EFL undergraduate students. From 16 empirical research publications being synthesized, we identify that there are four major criteria defining the feedback types: written/spoken; in-class/out-of-class; anonymous/non-anonymous; trained/untrained. These four criteria overlap with each other since every study involves more than one type of feedback.

#### **1. Written/Spoken**

According to our analysis, 7 studies conduct written feedback (e.g., Cahyono & Prayogo, 2019) and 4 studies use spoken feedback (e.g., Yu & Lee, 2015). Furthermore, 5 studies employ both types of feedback as students write their comments first and then express them with their peers face-to-face (e.g., Zhao, 2018). Discussing further the positive effect of having dialogic interaction and negotiation, Zhu & Carless (2018) and Hirose (2012) propose the use of bimodal peer feedback in either peer or small group peer feedback where students are facilitated to use written and spoken modes. Furthermore, Zhu & Carless (2018) highlight that students can use their L1 in the spoken mode which enables students to exchange s and view more efficiently and make them more confident and more motivated in joining the peer feedback activity. Similarly, Yu & Hu (2017) argue that L1 usage during peer feedback is considered to be an essential facilitative factor. However, Zhu & Carless (2018) state an obvious limitation in a way that those who will participate more actively in the spoken mode are those who are normally talkative and good at social interaction.

## 2. In-Class/Out-of-Class

Regarding this criterion, feedbacks in the majority of studies were delivered in class (e.g., Zhao, 2018; Rahimi, 2013). Face-to-face in-class peer feedback provision is believed to be able to provide students with better interaction patterns and negotiation of meanings (Zhao, 2018; Zhu & Carless, 2018). Students who act as both reviewers and receivers can directly communicate their ideas and thoughts and, at the same time, clarify unclear ideas or feedback in a more relaxing atmosphere. Most of the in-class face to face feedback processes were video recorded, providing rich data to analyze using methods such as interview or stimulated recall, which is discussed in the data analysis section. Four studies have peer review sessions both in and after class (Yu & Lee, 2015; Yu & Hu, 2017a; Tian & Li, 2018; Shen, Bai, Xue, 2020), enabling students to be more prepared while expressing feedbacks in class. Only one study, Wang and Lu's (2016), solely applies after-class peer feedback asking the students to act as pen pals and providing reviews in the journal books.

## 3. Anonymous/Non-Anonymous

Non-anonymous peer feedback is suggested by most of the researchers (e.g., Zhu & Carless, 2018; Zhao, 2018). Following the sociocultural perspective, non-anonymous in-class peer feedback enables reviewers and receivers of feedback to interact directly in order to provide assistance, mediate their needs, and clarify their understanding during peer feedback (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). However, Yu & Hu (2017) suggest that for the success of non-anonymous peer feedback, teachers need to pay close attention to the pairing pattern. They suggest that a "friendship" grouping pattern could make students "feel less inhibited in offering criticisms and showing disagreement, and did not misunderstand each other's good intention" (p. 32). Although most of the researchers suggest non-anonymous peer feedback practice, Wang & Lu (2016), Nguyen (2016), and Kim (2019) take Wang and Lu's (2016) project as an example. They conducted a study on the use of the term "pen-pals" as a peer feedback practice in China setting and found out that this practice could motivate students especially those reluctant ones to be more enthusiastic. However, their findings show that 27.6% of the participants did not think that they make progress in English writing in general. In addition, Rahimi (2013) employs non-anonymous feedback in the first round and anonymous peer feedback in the second round. Therefore, more studies with anonymous or the mixture of anonymous and non-anonymous peer review are warranted to investigate its effectiveness.

## 4. Trained/Untrained

Researchers including Zhao (2018), Rahimi (2013), and Cao, Yu, & Huang (2018) emphasize that the success of peer feedback is dependent on the use of training given to students before they conduct peer feedback. They summarize the benefits of training in 3 main categories. First, training widens students' focuses, from only focusing on form feedback like grammar and spelling to global errors. Second, helps students improve their self-confidence in writing as well as reviewing other's writing draft. Finally, it benefits students' linguistic knowledge, an important aspect of peer feedback practice.

All the primary studies involve training with different types for the student, except Lei's (2017) which is not clear whether the training was offered. Some use text modals in class to explain the peer feedback process (e.g., Yu & Hu, 2017a); some offer criteria of the high-quality feedback (e.g., Cao, Yu, & Huang, 2018); some provide immediate teacher assistance in class (e.g., Shen, Bai, & Xue, 2020). While the other 13 studies apply trainings to all the students, the quality and the quantity of the training in Rahimi's (2013) and Zhu & Carless's (2018) vary among different groups. For instance, in Zhu and Carless's research (2018), three groups received little or minimal training whereas the other two groups were trained for 10 minutes about the procedure and criteria of peer feedback in detail.

From the sociocultural perspective, training with various types provides scaffolding for students to be more prepared for providing feedbacks with higher quality. According to the primary sources published in the last ten years, it is increasingly the case that students participating in the peer feedback activities with pre-training or instant guidance from their English teachers. However, the role of training for peer feedback remains seldom explored in the college EFL context. From the studies, only one study centers on this issue (Rahimi, 2013) exploring the influences of training on the quality of students' feedbacks and writings. Thus, more attention needs to be paid to it.

### ***Kinds of research objectives that are addressed***

Based on the study review, the most commonly addressed research target is students' perceptions toward the peer feedback processes and products, discussed in seven journal articles (e.g., Nguyen, 2016; Wang & Lu, 2016). What stood out among these studies are those explore students' attitudes from the perspectives of receiver, giver, and even observer respectively (Tian & Li, 2018; Zhu & Carless, 2018; Nguyen, 2016). The second most frequently discussed issue is students' writing ability and quality after receiving feedbacks (e.g., Wang & Lu, 2016; Daud, Gilmore & Mayo, 2013). Some researchers center on students' motivation of participating in peer feedback activities (Yu & Lee, 2015; Wang & Lu, 2016) and the extent of students' adoption of their peers' suggestions into their revisions (Lei, 2017; Yu & Hu, 2017b). What is more, two studies target at students' preference for types of feedbacks. Tian & Li (2018) found that, in general, the students preferred giving positive feedbacks over negative ones on their partners' writing, in both oral and written processes. In Alnasser and Alyousef's research article (2015), students reported preferences for receiving macro and micro feedbacks on similar levels.

Seldom-voiced points in these studies are about students' characteristics influenced by the feedback activities, including critical thinking ability (Daud, Gilmore, & Mayo, 2013), metacognition (Nguyen, 2016), and learner autonomy (Shen, Bai, & Xue, 2020), in spite of their important roles in learners' writing development. Another marginal target is the effects of training (Rahimi, 2013). Besides, only one study investigates students' interaction patterns involved in peer feedback dialogues (Zhao, 2018). Given that interaction enables reviewers to understand and address their peers' needs in appropriate ways (Zhao, 2018), this synthesis also flags up the need to investigate students' interaction patterns in the peer feedback process, both written and oral.

***Kinds of data collection and analysis methods that are implemented to address the research questions***

The 16 primary studies that we synthesized employed qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods to respond to their research questions. To be specific, there were 6 studies that were conducted qualitatively (Yu & Lee, 2015; Yu & Hu, 2017a; Yu & Hu, 2017b; Cao, Yu, Huang, 2018; Zhu & Carless, 2018; Nguyen, 2016) and 6 studies that employed mixed methods (Wang & Lu, 2016; Lei, 2017; Tian & Li, 2018, Shen, Bai, & Xue, 2020; Kim, 2019; Alnasser & Alyousef, 2015). The other four studies were conducted quantitatively, including the studies from Zhao (2018), Rahimi (2013), Daud, Gilmore, and Mayo (2013), and Kusumaningrum, Cahyono, and Prayogo (2019). The clear presentation can be seen in the following table.

In terms of data collections, most of the qualitative studies employed interviews (most of them were semi-structured interviews). From the analysis, we found that interviews were chosen to answer research questions related to students' motivation of peer feedback practice (Yu & Lee, 2015), students' attitude and perception on peer feedback (Cao, Yu, & Huang, 2018; Zhu & Carless, 2018; Nguyen, 2016), types of feedback (Yu & Hu, 2017a; Kim, 2019), the extent the peer feedback is incorporated into writing (Lei, 2017; Yu & Hu, 2017b), and students' autonomy in peer feedback (Nguyen, 2016; Shen, Bai, & Xue, 2020). The other data collections were through video recording of peer feedback sessions (Yu & Lee, 2015; Yu & Hu, 2017a; Yu & Hu, 2017b; Cao, Yu, & Huang, 2018; Nguyen, 2016), stimulated recalls (Yu & Lee, 2015; Yu & Hu, 2017a; Yu & Hu, 2017b; Cao, Yu, & Huang, 2018; Tian & Li, 2018), and the analysis of students' drafts and revisions (Yu & Lee, 2015; Lei, 2017; Yu & Hu, 2017a; Yu & Hu, 2017b). Few of the studies also implemented open-ended questions in the survey (Tian & Li, 2018; Kim, 2019), class observation fieldnotes, and reflective journals (Zhu & Carless, 2018). Meanwhile, questionnaires with Likert Scale were mostly employed for the quantitative method by the researchers (Wang & Lu, 2016; Lei, 2017; Tian & Li, 2018; Shen, Bai, & Xue, 2020; Kim, 2019; Daud, Gilmore & Mayo, 2013; Alnasser & Alyousef, 2015). The other data collections for the quantitative method were from the students' writing scores (Wang & Lu, 2016; Lei, 2017; Kusumaningrum, Cahyono, & Prayogo, 2019; Rahimi, 2013), and Cornell Critical Thinking Test Level X (Daud, Gilmore & Mayo, 2013). The complete presentation of the data collection category can be seen below.

Table 1. Qualitative Data Collection Category

Qualitative Data	Studies
Interview (most of them are semi-structured)	Yu & Lee, 2015; Wang & Lu, 2016; Lei, 2017; Yu & Hu, 2017a; Yu & Hu, 2017b; Cao, Yu, & Huang, 2018; Zhu & Carless, 2018; Shen, Bai, & Xue, 2020; Alnasser & Alyousef, 2015; Kim, 2019; Nguyen, 2016
Video recording of peer feedback	Yu & Lee, 2015; Yu & Hu, 2017a; Yu &



sessions (5 studies)	Hu, 2017b; Cao, Yu, & Huang, 2018; Nguyen, 2016
Stimulated recalls (5 studies)	Yu & Lee, 2015; Yu & Hu, 2017a; Yu & Hu, 2017b; Cao, Yu, & Huang, 2018; Tian & Li, 2018
Draft and revisions (4 studies)	Yu & Lee, 2015; Lei, 2017; Yu & Hu, 2017a; Yu & Hu, 2017b
Open-ended questions in survey (2 studies)	Tian & Li, 2018; Kim, 2019
Audio recording of peer feedback sessions (1 study)	Tian & Li, 2018
Peer interaction protocol (1 study)	Zhao, 2018
Class Observation Fieldnotes (1 study)	Zhu & Carless, 2018

Table 2. Quantitative Data Collection Category

Quantitative data	Studies
Questionnaires with Likert Scales (7 studies)	Wang & Lu, 2016; Lei, 2017; Tian & Li, 2018; Shen, Bai, & Xue, 2020; Kim, 2019; Daud, Gilmore & Mayo, 2013; Alnasser & Alyousef, 2015
Writing scores (4 studies)	Wang & Lu, 2016; Lei, 2017; Kusumaningrum, Cahyono, & Prayogo, 2019; Rahimi, 2013
Cornell Critical Thinking Test Level X (1 study)	Daud, Gilmore & Mayo, 2013

Furthermore, we also classified how the data were analyzed in those 16 primary studies. Qualitatively, some researchers conducted transcripts analysis (Yu & Lee, 2015), texts analysis (Yu & Hu, 2017a; Yu & Hu, 2017b), draft and revision analysis (Min, 2016), Content analysis (Nguyen, 2016), and thematic analysis of reflective journals and observation fieldnotes (Zhu & Carless, 2018). In the quantitative analysis, the researchers preferred to conduct quasi-experimental study (Daud, Gilmore, & Mayo, 2013) and causal-comparative study (Kusumaningrum, Cahyono, & Prayogo, 2019). Additionally, there are two major data analysis tools, they are: NVivo10 to analyze peer interaction (Zhao, 2018), SPSS to analyze the students' scores (Rahimi, 2013). The mixed-method, therefore, would be the combination of the qualitative and quantitative ones. For

example, the study of Lei (2017) employed qualitative analysis of interviews and descriptive analysis of writings combined with analyzing the writing tests and questionnaires using SPSS. Another example is Tian and Li's (2018) study, which analyzed interview transcripts qualitatively, employed descriptive analysis, and paired sample T-test with SPSS to analyze the questionnaire. The presentation is as follows.

Table 3. Data Analysis Category

Analysis Methods	Studies
Qualitative (6 studies)	<p>Yu &amp; Lee, 2015 (transcripts were analyzed with Miles and Huberman's 1995 qualitative data analysis scheme; drafts and revisions were analyzed with text analysis approach (Min, 2006))</p> <p>Yu &amp; Hu, 2017a (text analysis and qualitative analysis on interview and recalls)</p> <p>Yu &amp; Hu, 2017b (text analysis on writing; Miles and Huberman's 1995 qualitative data analysis scheme)</p> <p>Cao, Yu, &amp; Huang, 2018 (Strauss &amp; Corbin, 1998 qualitative approach)</p> <p>Zhu &amp; Carless, 2018 (thematic analysis of reflective journals and observation fieldnotes)</p> <p>Nguyen, 2016 (content analysis)</p>
Quantitative (4 studies)	<p>Rahimi, 2013 (SPSS analyzing students' scores)</p> <p>Daud, Gilmore, &amp; Mayo, 2013 (quasi-experimental study)</p> <p>Kusumaningrum, Cahyono, &amp; Prayogo, 2019 (causal-comparative study)</p> <p>Wang &amp; Lu, 2016 (quasi-experimental-control group and experimental group; qualitative analysis of interview)</p>
Mixed-Method (6 studies)	<p>Lei, 2017 (qualitative analysis of interview, descriptive analysis of writings; writing tests and questionnaires analyzed by SPSS)</p> <p>Tian &amp; Li, 2018 (Qualitatively analyzing recall interview transcripts; descriptive analysis and paired sample T-test with SPSS analyzing questionnaire)</p> <p>Shen, Bai, &amp; Xue, 2020 (thematic analysis for interview; ANOVA analysis of questionnaire of both experimental and controlled groups quasi-experimental data)</p> <p>Kim, 2019 (statistics analysis of questionnaire; qualitative analysis of interview and open-ended</p>

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questions of survey)

Alnasser & Alyousef, 2015 (quasi-action study;  
qualitative analysis of interview)

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From the explanation and tables presented above, it is identified that the research on peer feedback in college EFL writing has employed various data collection and analysis methods. It indicates that research on peer feedback in college EFL writing has provided throughgoing findings and results, both qualitatively and quantitatively from various data collections and sources. The 16 empirical articles show that the research in this field has been conducted in diverse EFL settings, including China (10 studies), Iran (1 study), Indonesia (1 study), Vietnam (1 study), Saudi Arabia (1 study), Malaysia (1 study), and Japan (1 study). However, there are still some gaps identified. First, based on the analysis, almost all of the studies were limited by their research participant sizes and sites. Most of them used one or two EFL classes for their research participants. Moreover, they only collected data from one site which was one university. Therefore, the findings could not be generalized for other EFL settings. It would be insightful for future research to focus on a similar topic in a broader setting with more participants. Second, some researchers conducted their research in their own classes, programs, and/or institutions. Although there are many benefits from being insiders, there are still several potential issues and conflicts that may appear during the data collection and the implementation processes of the research. It is suggested that future researchers have strategies to resolve or minimize the impacts of conflicts or issues resulted from positioning themselves as insiders.

### ***Methodological challenges reported in the studies reviewed***

The section of methodology, especially the data collection stage, takes a very essential part among researchers' research stages because it is the time for researchers to really interact with their research participants and data. Research in the social and behavioral sciences involves humans and commonly reveals a great amount of information about their lives during data collection and analysis. With the vast growing research interests in this field, there are increasing concerns and awareness on the paucity of the participants' rights and privacy. From the 16 primary studies reviewed in this study, there are some methodological challenges identified, especially related to potential ethical issues. Three articles explicitly stated about research ethics and (potential) ethical issues appearing during their data collection and analysis. Zhu and Carless' (2018) research on "dialogue within peer feedback processes: clarification and negotiation of meaning" clearly mentioned how research ethics are accommodated by mentioning that "the student received ethical approval and observed anonymity, voluntary participation, freedom to withdraw and respect for participants" (p. 888). The research data collection is carefully planned as the researcher also tried to minimize the influence on the participants by positioning self as a non-participant observer. Furthermore, the article included a disclosure statement by the end of the paper

which stated that there was no potential conflict of interest reported by the authors.

Similarly, Daud and Mayo's (2013) study on exploring the potency of peer evaluation to develop critical thinking for tertiary academic writing implemented careful data collection steps in order to anticipate ethical issues. To deal with the selection threat, the researchers chose the participants from the same year and discipline of study. Moreover, gender, educational background, and teaching experience were also considered when selecting the instructors. Unlike the previous two studies, Nguyen's (2016) study on peer feedback practice in EFL tertiary writing classes identified the potential ethical issue found during the observation. She pointed out that the lecturers' organization of peer feedback grouping may result in the potential ethical issue since they only grouped the students based on the location where they were sitting down. It is suggested that pairing or grouping of the students need to consider accommodating the students' choice of autonomy and equity.

In addition to what has been stated explicitly, some potential ethical issues in the methodological part were also implicitly identified. The potential issues are mostly related to research participants' autonomy principle, justice, and equity. First, studies conducted by Wang and Lu (2016) and Rahimi (2013) used controlled and experimental groups for their data collection in order to answer their research objectives related to the students' attitude, motivational level, and preference. When controlled groups and experimental groups receive different treatments, it might bring the potential issue in justice or fairness. From the research ethic principle, it is stated that everyone who participates in research should be treated fairly and equally. Another potential ethical issue related to fairness is identified in Alnasser and Alyousef's (2015) study, in which they had 41 participants who were male-only without making any justification why only male students were chosen. This decision raises a potential issue towards equity of gender being involved in research. Finally, a potential ethical issue related to participants' choice of autonomy is also identified. Most of the research settings are conducted in writing classes in the EFL college settings. One example is the study by Kusumaningrum, Cahyono, and Prayogo (2019) in Indonesia. Their study involved 55 fourth-semester students who attended an argumentative writing course. Since the participants were taking that class, they were not given any choice whether or not they were willing to participate. Besides, the group distribution for different treatments was directly decided by the teacher. Therefore, it is actually suggested that the researcher could review the research ethic principles before making decisions on the data collection stages.

## **Conclusion**

This study synthesizes 16 empirical studies focusing on peer feedback in the college EFL settings published in the last ten years. It showcases the frequent types of feedback, the commonly addressed research targets, the data collection and analysis methods, and the methodological challenges reported in the studies reviewed. From the synthesis, there are four major types of peer feedback most commonly conducted for EFL undergraduate students, including written/ spoken, in-class/ out-of-class, anonymous/ non-anonymous, and trained/ untrained feedback. Furthermore, it is revealed that investigating students' perceptions

toward peer feedback becomes the most commonly addressed research objective. However, it is found out that students' interaction patterns in the peer feedback process and the effects of training are seldom investigated. It can be a great recommendation for future researchers to investigate. In terms of data collection and analysis, the findings reveal that the researchers have employed various research methods including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Various data collection methods are also administered to provide sufficient data for analysis. Regarding the methodological challenges reported in the studies reviewed, out of 16 reviewed studies, 3 studies acknowledge research ethics to anticipate potential ethical issues explicitly. However, there are also some potential ethical issues identified from reviewing the studies. The potential issues are mostly related to research participants' autonomy principle, justice, and equity. It is hoped that the results of this synthesis paper can shed light on future research about peer feedback in EFL college writing. Still, some limitations associated with limited primary sources must be borne in mind. First, we excluded research of peer feedback in EFL college settings with technology, such as online composition and revision. Second, only English written publications were included in this systematic review. Future synthesis could investigate resources in other languages to further our knowledge in this area

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